Ears on the Street: Coqui Frog Patrols and the Guarding of Silence in One Hawaiian Village.pdf

Sarah Marusek
Marilyn Brown, University of Hawaii, Hilo

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/sarah_marusek/
Chapter 9

Ears on the Street

Coqui Frog Patrols and the Guarding of Silence in One Hawaiian Village

Marilyn Brown and Sarah Marusek

The State of Hawai‘i, as both a tourist destination and importer of all manner of goods, is also a destination for many unwanted, invasive species. In many places on the Island of Hawai‘i, the evenings ring with the chirping of tiny, yet noisy coqui frogs. Few residents are enchanted by these sounds. They can be quite deafening and, to some, spoil the ambience in this largely rural paradise. The arrival of these noisy amphibians was initially ignored. But when it seemed to be too late, the County government that declared defeat in the face of the frog’s rapid proliferation. But in one small community, the challenge has been taken up by individuals who object to this aural environmental pollution. Our study focuses on one socially and culturally distinct community made up of nominal outsiders whose environmental sensitivities depart from those of most local residents of Hawai‘i Islands. In contrast, these Volcano residents refuse to accept the foreign frog invasion of their construction of paradise and have taken to the streets to fight.

The residents of Volcano, a community on the slope of the Kilauea Volcano, decided to promote their notion of what the night should sound like. In this chapter, we explore the socio-legal reaction to the noise generated by the coqui frog and how the community of Volcano created and enforced their own neighborhood-based response to the frogs. They sought the sanctity of silence, both out of environmental concerns and to protect their own property values. In absence of effective environmental actions by the State and County to suppress the frog, citizens of Volcano have engaged in a vigorous program of policing the night’s “natural” silence and asserting their sovereignty rights relative to the little, invasive amphibians.

In this analysis, Volcano’s coqui project provides insight into the cultural aspects of law, the regulability of space, and the legal frameworks of offensive noise. On Hawai‘i Island, the Big Island in the State of Hawai‘i,
a host of sounds can be heard. They range from native and non-native birds, airplanes, the tsunami siren (which is tested monthly), and the occasional streetcar race in the middle of the night. But with a decibel level seemingly off the scale, there’s the call of the coqui frog. Sounding like “ko-kee,” the coqui frog (Eleutherodactylus coqui) sounds like beautiful night music to some (and is celebrated in its native Puerto Rico). But to residents of Volcano, it is a high-pitched, pervasive and offensive noise. Emitting chirps up to 80–90 decibels, the tiny frog when alone or in great numbers is loud and it drowns out other available sounds. Arriving in Hawai‘i from Puerto Rico in about 1988, the tiny coqui, which is roughly the size of a dime, has thrived in its new habitat where populations of the frog have exploded throughout the island. With no known enemies except the human being, the coqui comes out at night to mate, and “ko-kee” with abandon.

The frog is considered an invasive species by the state and numerous state agencies, which initially thought to eradicate the frog, now attempt merely to contain it to Hawai‘i Islands. Currently, under state law, “any person or organization who intentionally transports, harbors, or imports with the intent to propagate, sell, or release the coqui may be charged with a class C felony and is subject to a minimum fine of $50,000 and maximum fine of $200,000, plus three years in prison.” In addition to the Hawai‘i Department of Agriculture, the Hawai‘i Department of Land and Natural Resources, nonprofit environmental groups, schools, realtors, and even neighborhood patrols, have joined the crusade against the noisy coqui. But, the coqui even have their advocates, making nocturnal soundscapes contested spaces.

SOUNDSCAPES AND ECOLOGY

Sounds that emerge from landscapes may be produced by biological processes, called biophony, or geophysical processes, called geophony, as well as by human activity, whose sound is called anthrophony. Biological or geophysical sounds (such as the wind blowing through trees) may be construed by some as being natural and therefore preferable to anthrophonically produced sounds. For example, urban nocturnal soundscapes are filled with the blare of sirens, roaring motors, and the intrusive noise of road traffic. Indeed, residents of rural communities may well prefer the ambience of “natural” nocturnal sounds and choose such areas for the relative tranquility of their soundscapes. But what of biophonic sounds that some argue don’t belong to a particular soundscape, despite their natural origins? The meaning of what we hear is premised not only on audible sounds, but also on who we are as listeners.

In his article “Hearing and Belonging: On Sounds, Faiths, and Laws,” Massimo Leone describes the impact of Islamic and Christian-based sound
on social space and characterizations of belonging based upon the presence or absence of certain sounds. Leone speaks of these sounds as the creation of socially expected frameworks of noise as a soundscape, which is that "space in which sounds can be produced, perceived and potentially correlated with meaning." As Leone asserts, the creation and reception of sound is a reflection of culturally based parameters of what should be heard. While the coqui’s nocturnal calling is beloved in rural Puerto Rico, some residents of Hawai’i Island argue that these sounds are out of place and should not be heard in nighttime surrounds. They are frustrated by the lack of effective official responses to the coqui infestation in Hawai’i. And, they are discouraged that eradication is no longer considered by scientists to be possible there, although some hope is held out for the state’s remaining islands.

**LAW’S INATTENTION AND COMMUNITY ACTION**

Since the arrival of the Puerto Rican frogs as stowaways in imported nursery plants, multiple statutes have resulted in various forms of coqui management under what Mariana Valverde calls a commonsensical approach to legal remedy. From prizes awarded by the Hawai’i Department of Education to schoolchildren for killing coqui to mandatory real estate disclosures regarding noise to state-sanctioned citric acid pesticides, the cultural embeddedness of anti-coqui sentiment pits law against frog. However, community-level responses to the frog infestation have devolved into resignation in all but a very few cases.

The village of Volcano, situated on the rainy, upper slopes of Kilauea Volcano, has initiated the Coqui Control Hotline for the purpose of coqui eradication. It takes calls day or night. In this eradication program, the ears on the street are just as important as the eyes on the street for stopping these alien species and their noise. The soundscape of silence, threatened by the invasive frog, is the foundation for a neighborhood-based ecological justice. However, in Volcano, justice is not for the frog, but instead for those who fight for maintaining property values in this enclave of mainland haole, middle-class professionals, scientists, academics, and artists. These residents set themselves apart from other Hawai’i Island communities infested with coqui by their proactive efforts to keep the frog out.

**THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF INVASIVE SPECIES**

Coqui are everywhere in on the Big Island, with possibly the highest concentration on the wetter eastern side of the island, in the Hilo and Puna Districts.
In Lava Tree State Park, in Puna, for example, coqui are estimated to “exceed 20,000 individuals an acre.” According to Robert Sugawarda of the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Hilo Field Station on Hawai’i, speaking about the numbers of coqui, “It is almost [sic] undescribable. They’re pretty much out of control.” The coqui invasion is of economic concern to the State of Hawai’i because it threatens multimillion dollar floriculture and nursery industries…private property values and tourism. While the coqui is purported by some to be a danger to the island ecosystem, the noise generated by the coqui is to many a far more detrimental impact. The chirp of the coqui at 80–90 decibels threatens the “enjoyment of life” framework in excess of the human health and welfare limits above the 70dBA level determined by the Hawai’i Department of Health, Hawai’i Revised Statutes Section 324F-1. Effectively, the coqui’s chirp is a violation of state noise ordinances.

In Hilo, children have been contemplated as playing a role in frog control efforts. In 2007, the Hawai’i Island Economic Development Board and the Coqui Frog Working Group proposed a “Coqui Bounty Hunter” program for East Hawai’i schoolchildren. The plan rewarded school kids for turning in coqui in zippered plastic bags over a two-week period. The students with the most coqui kills could win Xbox 360s, PlayStation 3s, iPods, and cash awards for their schools. For various reasons, this “frog-killing binge” did not prevail. A variety of school principals objected to the killing, the collection, or the lack of school officials’ involvement in the proposal. According to an Associated Press report, Hilo High School Vice Principal Chad Farias stated, “As for actual eradication, I don’t see a way of the school being involved in that. It’s not part of our standards to be involved in eradication.”

While the frog is now safe from bounty-hunting schoolchildren, the noisy coqui nonetheless creates a stir in the real estate market. According to Hawai’i Revised Statutes Chapter 487A “Language of Consumer Transactions,” the Hawai’i Association of Realtors must make both seller and buyer aware of the presence of coqui in all private real estate sales. In Hawai’i Island Property Disclosures, buyers are warned about aircraft noise, wastewater disposal, insurance, volcanoes, and the presence of the coqui. “Because tree frogs are nocturnal, Buyers and their Realtors will not hear any chirping sounds that are associated with the frogs during the daytime hours of the subject property… and are advised to visit the subject property in the evening to determine the level of frog infestation and frog chirping and whether it is acceptable to Buyer” (Hawai’i Island Property Disclosure). Despite the legal warnings, some buyers still may not be fully aware of the noise created by the coqui. Three days before the finalizing of $1.9 million sale of a vacant lot in the Wainaku area of Hilo, the buyers sued on the grounds that the property has been misrepresented as “all one could hear is the sound of dying and tortured animal (which is the sound of the frogs occupying the area).” The property
was also in an area frequented by drug dealers and prostitutes. The case was dismissed by Hawai‘i Third Circuit Judge Glenn Hara in January 2010. Judge Hara cited the buyers’ signature of the Hawai‘i Island Property Disclosure, in which the audibility of the coqui could have been heard prior to signing. Apparently, the presence of drug dealers and prostitutes was an acceptable neighborhood phenomena.

At night, the sound of the coqui can be deafening in some areas. Brooks A. Kaiser and Kimberly Burnett assert “the primary economic effect of the frog is noise pollution.” The noise generated by the tiny coqui goes further than just annoyance or ecological damage to create an economic harm to the island. “Economic theory suggests that property values for locations with noise pollution should be lower than comparable properties without.” The two authors focus on property values in Puna. They assert that “the presence of frogs, however, does have a significant negative impact on property values.” With such evidence, homeowners in Volcano who are experiencing a slower increase of coqui when compared to Puna, are nonetheless concerned about their property values. Additionally, the endemic noises of the rain forest where Volcano is located on Hawai‘i Island may be just as valuable for purposes of property valuation.

**PATERNAL CARE AND THE SCIENCE OF COQUI**

As objects of scientific study, the coqui frog garners a good deal of interest on Hawai‘i Island. Usually it is with community members wanting an applied solution to the pest. Research at the University of Hawai‘i College of Pharmacy aims to examine unique neurotransmitter systems in these frogs and trace their early development. Drugs like antidepressants can be tested on coqui since their neurochemical systems are similar to those of other vertebrates. Another line of research here tests the role of prolactin in making coqui frogs ‘good dads.’ Indeed, male coqui zealously guard their eggs, keeping them moist while the female goes on to seek new reproductive opportunities. As interesting, and even admirable, as these paternal activities may seem to scientists, most coqui connoisseurs bemoan the frogs’ reproductive success.

The translation of coqui research from the lab to the public is being shaped by community demands for ways to control the frogs. One University of Hawai‘i researcher specializing in behavioral neuroscience and developmental biology, is in demand as a speaker for community groups such as Rotary. His finding that stimulation of the serotonin subsystem could quiet the frogs was greeted with great interest as a potential new weapon in the anti-frog arsenal.
Science has, in fact, provided effective techniques to control coqui. There are a range of agricultural, chemical, and mechanical means to kill the frogs or prevent them from invading an area. Those Volcano residents fearful of infestation are encouraged to wash decorative or other plants prior to transporting them home. Warnings about frogs “hitchhiking” to Volcano appear on a coqui control web site built by anti-coqui activists. Readers can find instructions to wash vehicles that have been parked in infested areas. A range of chemical agents are sprayed or applied to coqui habitat, many of which can be easily used by the homeowner. Lastly, capturing the coqui by hand is a preferred method among experienced coqui patrollers. The “coqui-stadores,” alerted by vigilant property owners, arrive after sundown with illuminating headgear to keep hands free for catching frogs. One, two, or more of them attempt to triangulate on the frog’s chirp—a difficult task since the frogs are said to throw their voices among the tree ferns like amphibious ventriloquists.

COQUI: ADVOCACY AND RESIGNATION

While the scientific discourse about coqui has been appropriated by many residents with an eye toward strategies of eradication, coqui do have their advocates on Hawai‘i Island. Syd Singer maintains that Hawai‘i doesn’t have a frog problem; it has an attitude problem. This coqui advocate appears on a video advertising his coqui sanctuary featuring the “Coqui Cottage” where visitors can listen to what he maintains are the mellifluous tones of tree frogs, in his words, an “enchanted night of coqui song.” Singer and a few volunteers plan to set up a program of deportation of the coqui back to Puerto Rico, where they are celebrated, not hunted.

The fact is that, having no natural enemies in Hawai‘i, the coqui isn’t leaving the island anytime soon. At a community meeting aimed at addressing...
a beachhead of coqui in the southern part of the Island of Kaua‘i, some residents voiced strong opposition to using County funds to control coqui, noting that they were here and people might as well learn to live with them. And it does appear that Hawai‘i Island residents who may have no love for the frogs manifest a passive resignation in the face of the overwhelming ‘invasion.’ By contrast, communities like Volcano have mounted aggressive and well-organized campaigns to control coqui despite the fact that eradication is no longer possible on Hawai‘i Island. Hawaii’s coqui problem and responses to it exemplify diverse approaches to environmental threats, the way these dangers are constructed, and the role of citizenry when government is no longer perceived as being effective.

Even in Volcano, however, resignation is beginning to set in given the incursions made by the frogs into more and more of the subdivisions. Leadership in the effort is shifting as long-time participants become burned out. Discourses of fighting the battle against frogs are sprinkled with talk of global warming and the inevitability of defeat as the formerly cool, wet winters of Volcano become friendlier to the amphibians. Lately, volunteers have begun to triage sections of Volcano into those areas ranging from the least infested to almost complete saturation. Volunteers or property owners can catch frogs by hand in the lightly infested lots where frogs have “hitchhiked” as singletons on material deliveries or vehicles and can be found along the road. In more heavily infested areas that contain breeding populations, volunteers or individual homeowners spray foliage with citric acid to remove frogs and eggs. The most heavily infested lots are considered saturated and are written off as unsalvageable. The volunteers fear that Volcano, once distinctive for its cool, quiet nights, will succumb to the frogs just as the rest of the Island has.

**VOLCANO VILLAGE: COQUI CONTROL AND PRIVILEGE**

Volcano Village is situated on the upper slopes of Kilauea volcano at an elevation of about 3500 to 4000 feet. Its 2,646 residents live in one of Hawaii’s increasingly rare upland rainforests, characterized by cool temperatures and abundant rainfall. In contrast with more developed areas of the State, house lots are comparatively large, ranging from a half to three acres. Many of the roads are unpaved and a significant number of households are off of the electrical grid. Volcano boasts a strong community association which encourages new and old residents to preserve as much as possible the ‘ohia trees and hapu‘u ferns that are the primary habitats of rare and endangered native birds. The more radical rainforest advocates are entirely prepared to confront transgressors. Homeowners who have violated this community compact by clear-cutting house lots have been targeted by these angry citizens who sometimes
tag their errant neighbors by spray-painting ‘shame’ in large letters on the adjoining road. Conformists comply with community constructs of nature and wilderness by hand-clearing just enough trees to accommodate a new house’s footprint. This is a far more expensive proposition than clearing land with heavy equipment and earthmovers, so preservation comes with a price. But environmentally minded newcomers appear quite willing to pay it.

This preservation of natural and wild spaces, even in the midst of human incursion into a formerly pristine rainforest, is reflective of a certain tradition in American environmentalism going back to the 19th century. As Taylor describes in her analysis of social characteristics associated with environmentalist movements, race, class, and gender have always shaped environmental frameworks, goals, and strategies of implementation. She notes that white, middle-class males have long dominated environmentalist movements associated with the goals of conservation and preservation of the wild spaces, as well as how notions of nature and wilderness are framed. Individuals from white, middle-class backgrounds have also dominated urban environmentalist efforts to address issues such as establishing open spaces and parks, pollution, workplace safety, and sanitation. In contrast, Taylor points out that people of working class backgrounds, native peoples, and communities of color most often mobilize around aspects of ecology related to social justice. These groups are primarily concerned with self-determination, loss of native lands, and environmental hazards sited disproportionately among the poor and powerless.

It would be unfair to write off Volcano Village as merely a white enclave whose residents are unconcerned about all of the issues above except for preservation of the wild. Saving the rainforest and its native species are legitimate environmental goals but their hegemonic prioritization tends to suggest a certain privilege. An analysis of the community’s social characteristics suggests that race, class, and other related factors distinguish Volcano from other East Hawai‘i communities, most of which have not mobilized against coqui to such a great extent. The town of Hilo, hardly an urban metropolis at 46,165 people, is far larger than Volcano’s 2,646 souls. Volcano residents are slightly more likely to be employed in professional, scientific, and management services industries than Hilo residents (7.9% vs. 7.4%). The annual per capita income in Volcano ($25,897) somewhat exceeds that of Hilo ($25,116). Differences in educational attainment are more apparent with 36.6% of the Village’s residents having a Bachelors or graduate degree compared with 29.7% of Hilo residents having such credentials. But the most striking differences are those having to do with place of birth and race. While recent census data for Hilo show that 17.4% of residents were born in another state, that figure for Volcano is 43.2%. Finally, of those Hilo residents endorsing single race membership in the 2010 census, 18.5% report being white. In contrast, 51.8% of Volcano residents report being white, nearly a three-fold difference.
These data on race and place of birth suggest that Volcano is a residential destination for whites and other newcomers to Hawai‘i. (Fewer than 10% are Native Hawaiians, who make up approximately 22% of the State’s population.) Framed in terms of American environmentalist movements, Volcano residents may be more likely than others to conceptualize the natural environment in romantic or poetic terms, embedded within a framework of freedom and wild spaces. Residents active in the coqui control initiative tend to be highly educated white males of nonlocal birth. Nevertheless, invasive plants and animals along with the loss of native birds and plants to extinction trouble Volcano environmentalists and regular citizens alike. Nor are these concerns overblown; the Hawaiian Islands have one of the very highest extinction rates of avian species on earth with a loss of 36 taxa since the beginning of the 20th century. The preservation of the audible nightscape from coqui chirping, signals comparative privilege, especially when compared to Native Hawaiian people who view the loss of indigenous lands and their traditional gathering rights to be far more critical environmental issues.

In Volcano, the coqui is hunted by local resident volunteers as part of the neighborhood watch group responsible for the Coqui Control Hotline. If a coqui is heard, a simple phone call to the hotline results in trained community volunteers arriving at the house to hunt and capture the coqui (which are usually frozen as a humane method of eradication). Called ‘coqui-stadores,’ these volunteers are coqui bounty hunters who receive a bounty of $25 per frog, paid for from the Coqui Control Hotline’s Association. This activity is the social response to the state’s inability to contain, much less eradicate the frog. As Volcano Village is nestled within a native tropical rain forest on the slopes of the active volcano Kilauea, sounds of endemic wildlife can be heard. The cultural framework of what Volcano sounds like can be transmogrified through the actions of the Coqui Control Hotline to engender a frontier response to law. Frontier law in this case refers to enforcement efforts considered to be the responsibility of those who are self-selected as agents of the community consciousness. If legal culture is “everything that makes a difference besides rules and structures,” then this regulation is inherent in the worldview of these outsiders, one where environmental ideas are informed by claims grounded in scientific imperatives. The actions of these privileged settlers in a local community invert the dynamics of social control between empowered insiders and marginalized outsiders as described by Engels in his study of legal consciousness in a rural mid-western town.

Because the coqui have not yet reached invasive populations in this part of Hawai‘i Island, village residents demonstrate that social control is a mobilization of law. By taking measures to control the coqui through the coqui-stadore program, this type of neighborhood watch group has taken law into their own hands. These volunteers have become the informal actors of...
legal mandate in order to keep the peace (and the ko-kee out) in Volcano and eliminate the obnoxious nocturnal cacophony.

CONCLUSION

Formal law can only go so far. Efforts at the state level to eradicate the coqui have not worked, while efforts to contain the coqui have shifted away from the Big Island to keeping the coqui off from the other islands. Meanwhile, coqui-generated noise challenges the cultural expectations of what Hawai‘i is supposed to sound like. When human-generated, noise can be protected speech,\textsuperscript{47} regulated speech, or sanctioned speech\textsuperscript{48} as it is heard in public spaces. However, animal-generated noise, particularly by tiny, nocturnal, invasive frogs, is much more difficult to control, much less regulate. Social responses to coqui-based noise pollution reveal a source of law that despite legal sanction, might be characterized as “frontier” law.

Social characteristics shape the mobilization of groups such as the coqui-stadores against an incursion into the nightscape that these residents find objectionable. Law and action are situated within white, middle-class experiences and knowledge (backed up by science) of what constitutes the natural environment. In a sense, coqui disturbance comes to symbolize the social structure\textsuperscript{49} and helps heighten the distinctiveness of Volcano as a community made up largely of white outsiders. Volcano citizens police the nightscapes of the rainforest, melding environmental boundaries with the social, marking off what is acceptable and what is pollution, establishing order in the face of nocturnal disorder. Yet, the irony that a large proportion of Volcano residents are themselves non-native outsiders like the coqui remains, for the most part, largely unarticulated.

NOTES


14. Leone, “Hearing and Belonging.”
15. “Haole” is the colloquial term in Hawai‘i for Caucasians.
17. Booth, “Amphibious Invasion.”
33. Tunison, Tim, Personal Communication with Authors, April 25, 2013.
35. Tunison, Tim, Personal Communication with Authors, April 25, 2013.
39. Taylor, “Race, Class, Gender.”
41. Tunison, Tim, Personal Communication with Authors, April 25, 2013.
43. Macaulay, p. 178.
45. We extend our thanks to the anonymous reviewer of this manuscript for suggesting the relevance of Engel’s work to this discussion.

REFERENCES


Chapter 9


Chapter 10

Naples’ Piazza Cavour or the Playground of the Law

Patrícia Branco

As a parent, there are things one might start noticing and questioning. These are things that one probably took for granted, like playgrounds or parks. These are the sort of places where, in the city, one would like to take the kids out to play and have some fun (and get a bit of vitamin D in the process).

When I was a kid, I didn’t question the legal arrangement of the playgrounds I went to play in. I just played. And, mostly I enjoyed the swing. I probably got bored after a while. After all, there was not much to do but ‘obey’ the pattern imposed: swing, slide, swing. I suppose I probably had more fun inventing my own games or playing with friends where I could do different things, like just running around. Even so, I got used to the so-called traditional playgrounds, the ones that generally contain conventional play equipment like the popular ‘four Ss’: swing, slide, sandbox, and seesaw.

And then I had a child. And I went to live in a large city. The city was Naples, Italy. I moved from a medium size city, Coimbra, Portugal. And I started looking for places to take my child to play outside of the home, like my parents had done when I was a child. It proved to be hard, as a parent, but wonderful for social observation, as a researcher.

Naples, as you can read from Wikipedia, is the capital of the Italian region Campania and the third-largest municipality in Italy, after Rome and Milan. It is the ninth most populous urban area in the European Union. It has a long and rich history, and a strange love-hate relationship with Vesuvius, the mountain-volcano. It is a city that can be read as a palimpsest, showing to us the continuous rewriting of its shape and form, layer by layer, era after era. And it has endured many social, political, criminal, and economic crises, being recently known worldwide also because of several garbage crises.

As one of the most populous urban areas in the European Union, the city is mostly covered by buildings, roads, and cars (and, of course, the hundreds
Chapter 10

of motorini that roar over the streets and sidewalks, every day, every hour of the day). This does not leave much space for natural environments, like parks. But it is also difficult to find urban open spaces, like playgrounds. And even if you do, you probably have to consider whether or not you find it appropriate for children to play in it, given its state of maintenance. That is why some reporters have commented that “Naples is not a city for children” (2014) or that “Naples, [is] the city of broken slides” (2013), since almost all city parks and children playgrounds are in a shameful condition, are unsafe and are often vandalized or damaged due to neglect and indifference.

In my quest for playgrounds, I have found one in our neighborhood, located in Piazza Cavour, and another one about a one km walking distance away, near the Basilica of Santa Chiara. Although the latter is better maintained and in a much better condition, my child’s preferences go to Piazza Cavour (or, as my child has “baptized” it, to “Santa Bour,” his toddler way of mixing the two playgrounds together: Santa [Chiara] plus [Piazza Cavour] Bour). And since I have spent there many hours of my life, it has turned out to be a familiar place, as well as a site of observation. The playground “Santa Bour” provides me with a unique set of “motion pictures” on the social order it governs. Even if it is commonly known as Piazza Cavour, its full name is Piazza Camillo Benso Conte di Cavour. This piazza is one of the old town squares in Naples. It is situated between the districts Stella and San Lorenzo. And it is a very busy place because there are two metro stations where it is located. Nevertheless, it is considered as a periphery within the city’s center, where micro-criminality is a frequent occurrence, and where many people have to deal with economic difficulties. Actually, unemployment, poverty, and the widespread presence of Camorra (a Mafia-type organization operating in Campania) have long characterized the quarter. As Ricotta highlights, urban sociology warns us of the critical trends affecting contemporary urban territories. In Piazza Cavour’s case: if some areas of the city are able to connect to the global flows of production and consumption, thus benefitting in terms of development and quality of life, there are other areas which are incapable of connecting to such flows, and so they pay a high price in terms of impoverishment and exclusion. In addition, the attention of public policy toward the needs of this territory is usually activated only in front of serious cases of disorder and violence.

Piazza Cavour’s playground, built in 2001, was renovated in 2015, and it was vandalized almost immediately after. When the playground was renovated, a swing for disabled children was put there. This could be read as a sign of justice, accessibility and equality of opportunities for all children, but it was used by (the abled children and teenagers) for everything else but that. The swing for the disabled children was one of the first things to get broken. Now, this broken swing stands as an empty structure, where the disabled